AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE SCOTT NUMBER 2 WELL IN BRAZORIA COUNTY TEXAS

Antiquities Permit 4380

By
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Brazos Valley Research Associates
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE SCOTT NUMBER 2 WELL IN BRAZORIA COUNTY, TEXAS

BVRA Project Number 06-27

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey of a proposed three-acre well site on the Retrieve Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in central Brazoria County, Texas was performed by Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) on January 2, 2007 under antiquities permit 4380. No archaeological sites were found, and no artifacts were collected. The area investigated consisted of three acres.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BVRA is grateful to those who made the successful completion of this project possible. David King of Slawson Exploration Company, Inc. was our primary contact for this project. He provided the project maps and information regarding the proposed construction. Michael King, also of Slawson Exploration Company, Inc., visited the project area during the archaeological survey to make sure that the proper area was being examined. Prison personnel who provided assistance and signed the permit application were Mike Corley and Larry Kent. The field survey was performed by Edward P. Baxter who also prepared some of the maps and co-authored the report. Jean Hughes, Records Conservator at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL), performed the records check for previously recorded sites in the project area and vicinity. Figure 1 was drafted by Lili G. Lyddon. Technical support was provided by Jennifer McMillan, and Nora Rogers served as editor and proofreader.

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FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Slawson Exploration Company, Inc. plans to construct a well site on the Retrieve Unit owned by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in Brazoria County, Texas (Figure 1). The well site is three acres. Within the footprint of the well site will be a water pit and a reserve pit. The water pit will be 150 feet by 150 feet and will be dug to a depth of six feet. The reserve pit will be 30 feet by 60 feet and will be dug to a depth of five feet. Except for the bore hole in the center of the well site and the two pits, the remainder of the three acres will not be disturbed below the surface. All construction in this area will consist of placing gravel on top of the existing surface.

The project area is in close proximity to Oyster Creek, a former channel of the Brazos River. This tract is viewed is a very high probability area for the presence of significant prehistoric sites. Therefore, an archaeological survey was recommended by the Texas Historical Commission, (THC) Archeology Division. Significant archaeological sites have been recorded along this stream and oxbow lakes associated with Oyster Creek. The project area is depicted on the Lake Jackson topographic quadrangle (2995-122) (Figure 2).

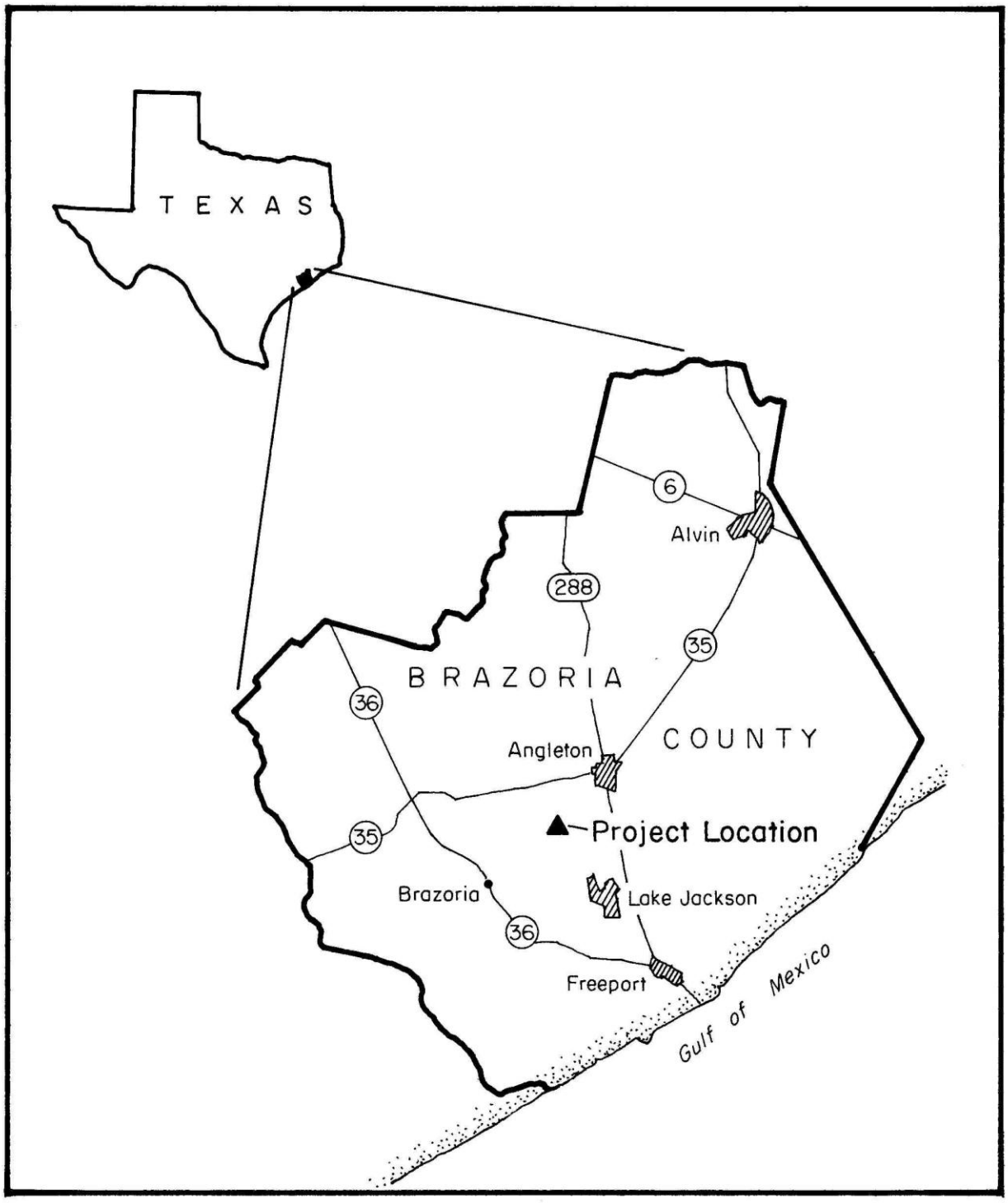

Figure 1. General Location

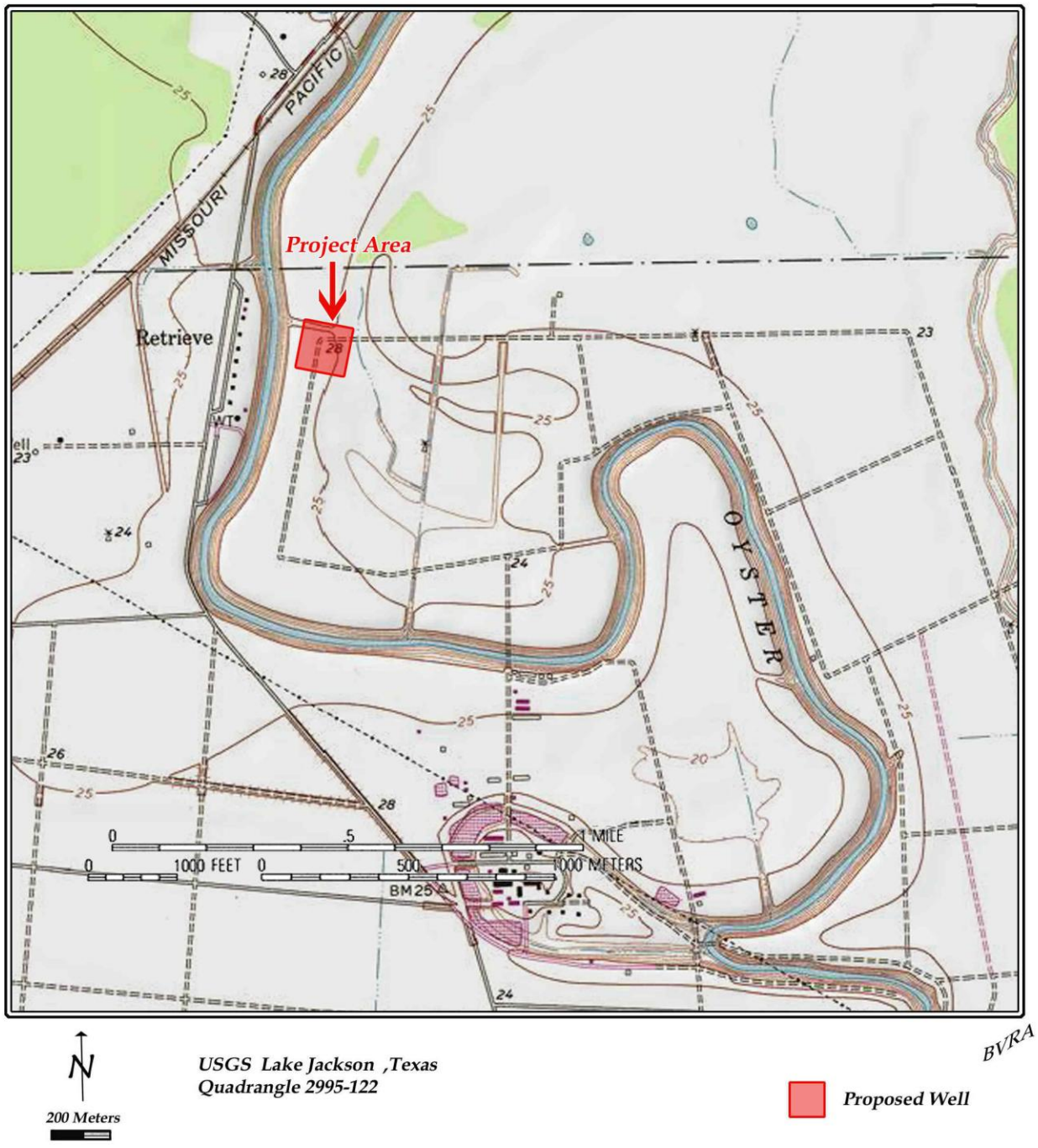

Figure 2. Project Area

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

General

Brazoria County is located in the southeastern part of Texas along the Gulf of Mexico. Much of the area is defined as Gulf Coast Prairie. It is bordered by Matagorda, Fort Bend, Harris, and Galveston counties. It covers an area of 1407 square miles. The land surface of the county is classified as broad and nearly level, and the highest elevation in the county is Damon Mound that rises to 146 feet above sea level. There are a few sloping areas that occur mainly adjacent to major drainages such as the San Bernard River, Brazos River, and Oyster Creek. Most drainages flow to the southeast through the major streams. Other streams empty directly into the Gulf of Mexico or into the bays adjacent to the gulf. According to the soils book for Brazoria County (Crenwelge et al. 1981:1), the inland portion of the county belongs to the Gulf Coast Prairies Major Land Resource Area.

Project Area

The project area is located on the east bank of Oyster Creek, a former channel of the Brazos River. Although low terraces are present in areas along the creek, the current project area is flat and generally featureless. At the time of this survey, the area was in pasture (Figure 3). According to the published soil survey for Brazoria County (Crenwelge et al. 1981:Sheet 75), the project area is located near the margin of two mapped soils – the Clemville silty clay loam (12) and the Norwood silt loam, 0 to 1 % slopes (33).

Clemville silty clay loam is described by Crenwelge et al. (1981:16) as being a nearly level, non-saline soil with slopes averaging about 0.4 %. Typically, this soil type is a moderately alkaline, calcareous silty clay loam to a depth of about 30 inches. The upper strata are reddish-brown, and the lower strata are yellowish red. Between 30 inches and 60 inches, the soil is reddish-brown, calcareous, moderately alkaline silty clay that grades to clay in the lower part. This soil is well drained and rarely floods. Surface runoff and permeability are slow. Historically, this soil is used mainly as cropland. In a few areas it may serve as pasture. The main crops grown in this soil are grain sorghum, cotton, soybeans. And corn. The native vegetation of this soil consists of a dense stand of hardwood trees with various understory plants.

Figure 3. View of Project Area

Norwood silt loam, 0 to 1 % slopes is described by Crenwelge et al. (1981:31) as a nearly level non-saline soil located on natural levees parallel to the larger bayous and rivers. Slopes average about 0.3 %. The surface layer of this soil is typically reddish-brown silt loam to a depth of about 48 inches. Between 48 inches and 54 inches, it is a yellowish-red very fine sandy loam. From 54 inches to 64 inches, it is a reddish-brown silt loam. This soil is calcareous and moderately alkaline throughout. It is well drained and rarely floods. Surface runoff is slow, and permeability is moderate. The soil is used mainly as cropland and pasture with the main crops being grain sorghum, soybeans, corn, peanuts, and some vegetable crops. The native vegetation of this soil consists of a dense stand of hardwood trees with various understory plants.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Brazoria County is located in the Southeast Texas cultural-geographical region of Texas as defined by the THC in a statistical overview published in 1985 (Biesaart et al. 1985:76). At that time, Brazoria County was fifth in the state in terms of numbers of sites recorded (1630) and percentage of sites recorded (8.06%). Within the region, Brazoria County was sixth with 89 sites (44% of the state and 5.46% of the region). According to Biesaart et al. (1981:114), all major periods of Texas prehistory were documented in Brazoria County in 1985. At that time, 89 sites had been recorded at TARL. Of this number, 43 sites were classified by temporal period as follows: Paleo-Indian (2 sites), General Archaic (11 sites), Middle Archaic (2 sites), Late Archaic (2 sites), and Late Prehistoric (26 sites). Information for the county in 1985 came primarily from surface collections (79 sites). Twenty-three sites were tested by hand in 1985, 12 were excavated, and 1 tested by machine. The archaeological potential of Brazoria County is reflected in part by the increasing number of recorded sites found as a result of cultural resource management studies. As a result of these investigations, the number of recorded sites now stands at over 220 sites (TARL site records).

According to a published planning document for the Eastern Planning Region of Texas (Kenmotsu and Perttula 1993:Figure 1.1.2), Brazoria County is situated within the Southeast Texas archeological study region. According to their research, site density within the region is low at 0.001 – 0.1 sites per square mile. Threats to sites in the area consist of mainly of urban sprawl, agriculture, and destruction by relic collectors.

Most of the archaeological surveys in the county consist of small area surveys, many of which did not locate cultural resources. State and Federal agencies such as the Corps of Engineers, Galveston District; Texas Water Development Board, and Texas Department of Transportation have been active in the county and surrounding area. The remaining studies have been conducted by universities, private contractors, and avocational archaeologists. Most of these projects can be found by checking the Abstracts in Texas Contract Archeology series published by the THC (Moore 1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, and 1994), a bibliography of Southeast Texas (Moore 1989), the site records at TARL, and the Sites Atlas on the Internet.

The importance of Oyster Creek in prehistoric times is demonstrated by a survey conducted by Moore Archeological Consulting in 1991 (Moore and Moore 1991). This study examined 750 acres adjacent to Oyster Creek (proposed Cullinan Park) and several oxbow lakes formed when the creek (formerly the Brazos River) changed course. In all, ten prehistoric sites were recorded. Three of these sites contained historic components. This project was north of the current project area and adjacent to the Texas Central Prison Farm. Of the ten prehistoric sites, three (41FB199 and 41FB200) were tested (Moore 1996). Later, in advance of park construction, data recovery was conducted at sites 41FB199 and 41FB200.

Both sites date to the Late Prehistoric period and have received the designation of State Archeological Landmark. Site 41FB200 produced numerous stone artifacts and ceramics. Bone preservation was excellent, and large quantities of fish and animal bone were found as well as plant materials recovered through flotation.

Brazoria County is one of the original Texas counties being created and organized in 1836. Activity in the area began in 1528 when the Spanish explorer *Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca* passed through what is now Brazoria County, probably crossing Oyster Creek, Old Caney Creek, and the Brazos and San Bernard rivers. Other Spanish adventurers were in the region in 1689 (*Alonso De Leon*) and 1727 (*Joaquin de Orobio y Basterra*). The first Anglos to settle the area were immigrants to Stephen F. Austin's colony in the 1820s. The population grew, largely due to the importance of the Brazos River as a transportation artery. Between 1849 and 1859, the area supported a plantation economy based on cotton and sugar cane, and Brazoria County became the wealthiest county in Texas.

One of the early plantations was the Retrieve Plantation on Oyster Creek four miles north of Lake Jackson. The plantation was established in 1839 by Abner Jackson. In the beginning, Jackson's plantation contained a two-story mansion, slave cabins, a sugar house, and an oven. All of the structures were constructed of brick. About 1842, he sold half of his interest in the plantation to James Hamilton. During the 1850s, the plantation produced several sugar crops, and it became one of the largest sugar producers in Texas. Merchandise was transported by steamboat along Oyster Creek to a point on Retrieve known as Steamboat Landing and carried goods to and from the plantation and Lake Jackson before the Civil War. In 1911, the land was leased and worked by hired laborers from the prison system. The State of Texas purchased the 7424 acre plantation in 1918 and continued to use the property as a prison farm. The Retrieve Unit has been one of the most productive farms in the Texas prison system. The above information was taken regarding Brazoria County and the Retrieve Plantation was taken from *The Handbook of Texas Online.*

Today, the population of the county is 257,256, and the economy is based on the petroleum and chemical industry, fishing, tourism, and agriculture.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Pre-Field Tasks

Prior to entering the field, the site records at TARL were checked for the presence of previously recorded archaeological sites in the project area and vicinity. Relevant archaeological reports documenting work in Brazoria County were reviewed in order to become familiar with the types of prehistoric and historic sites found in the area. In order to comply with the law, a One Dig was performed to make sure that no buried utilities would be affected by the backhoe trenching. The One Dig test number was 063535108.

Field Survey

The Principal Investigator was William E. Moore, and the Project Archaeologist was Edward P. Baxter. The entire project area was investigated by a 100% Pedestrian Survey and backhoe trenching. Two backhoe trenches were excavated at the location of the proposed water pit and reserve pit (Figure 4) , and they were dug to the APE. These trenches were 36 inches wide, 10 meters long and between 5 and 6 feet deep. Backhoe Trench 1 was dug in the area of the proposed reserve pit and was excavated to a depth of five feet. Backhoe Trench 2 was dug in the area of the proposed water pit and was excavated to a depth of six feet. Each trench was examined for features and artifacts and profiled in the field (Figures 5 and 6). The location of the two trenches is depicted on the map that illustrates the well site. Photographs of the project area were taken with a digital camera, and a hand-held GPS was used to create waypoints to help locate the trenches.

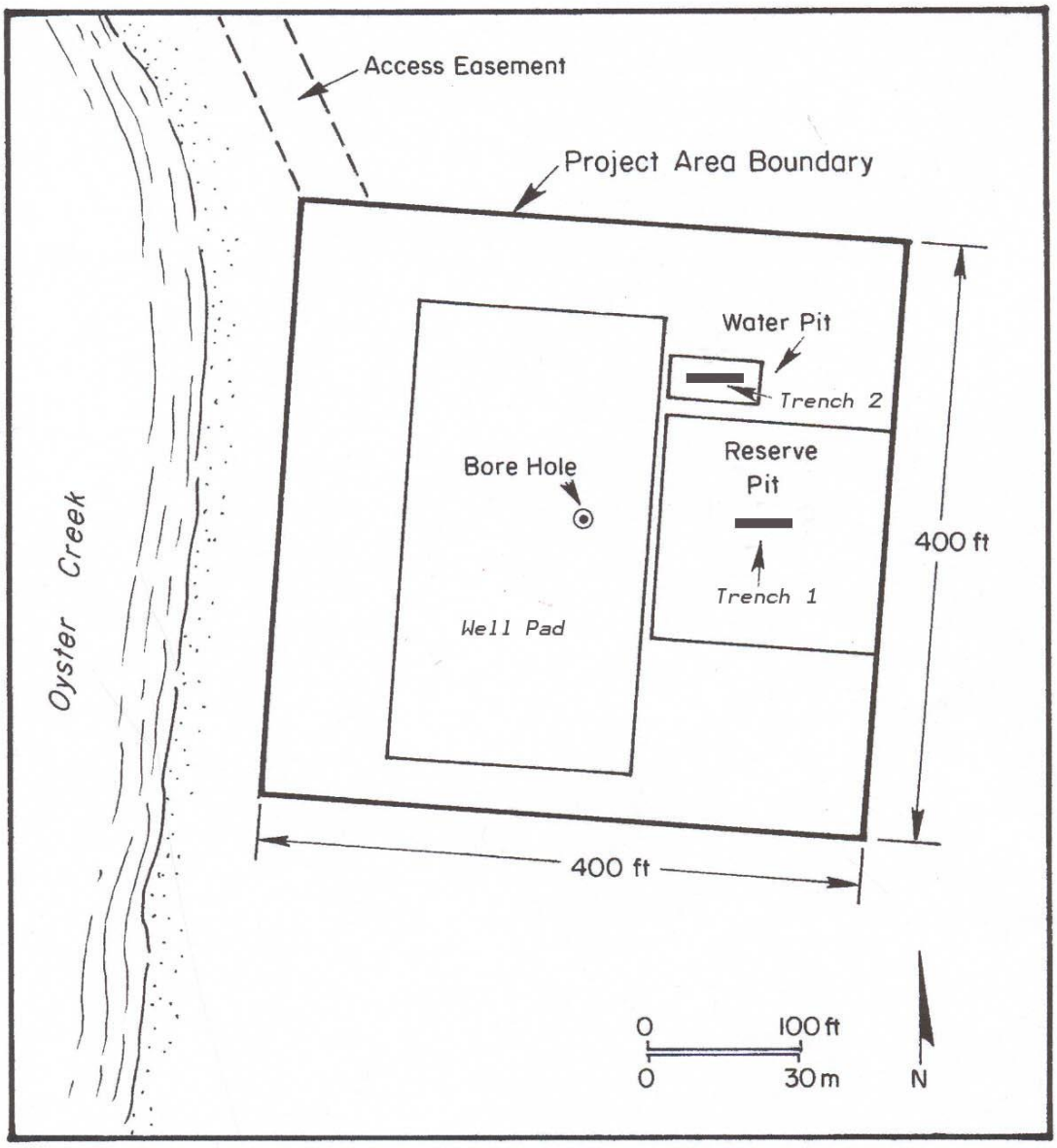

Figure 4. Plan View of Project Area and Backhoe Trenches

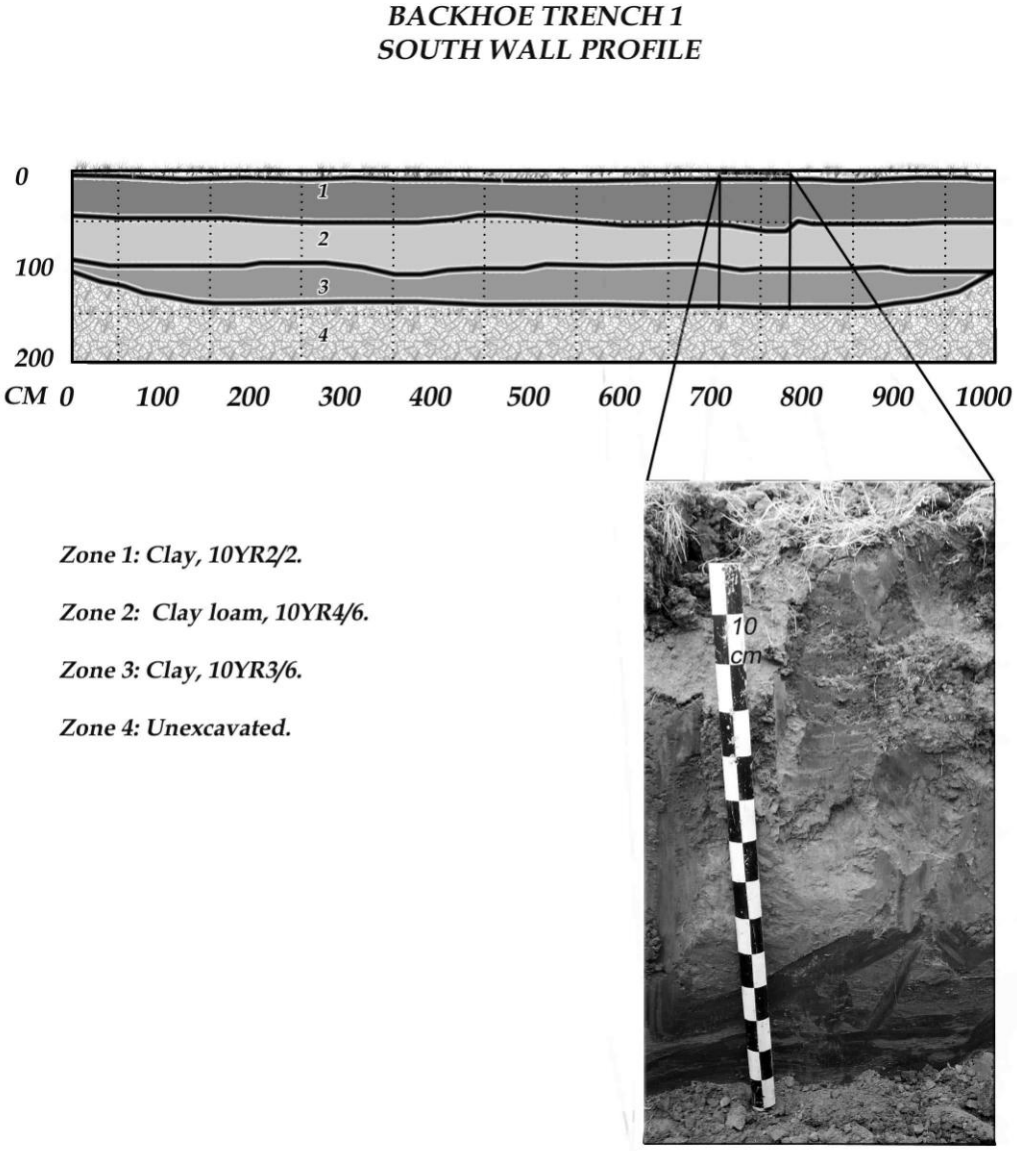

Figure 5. Trench 1 Profile

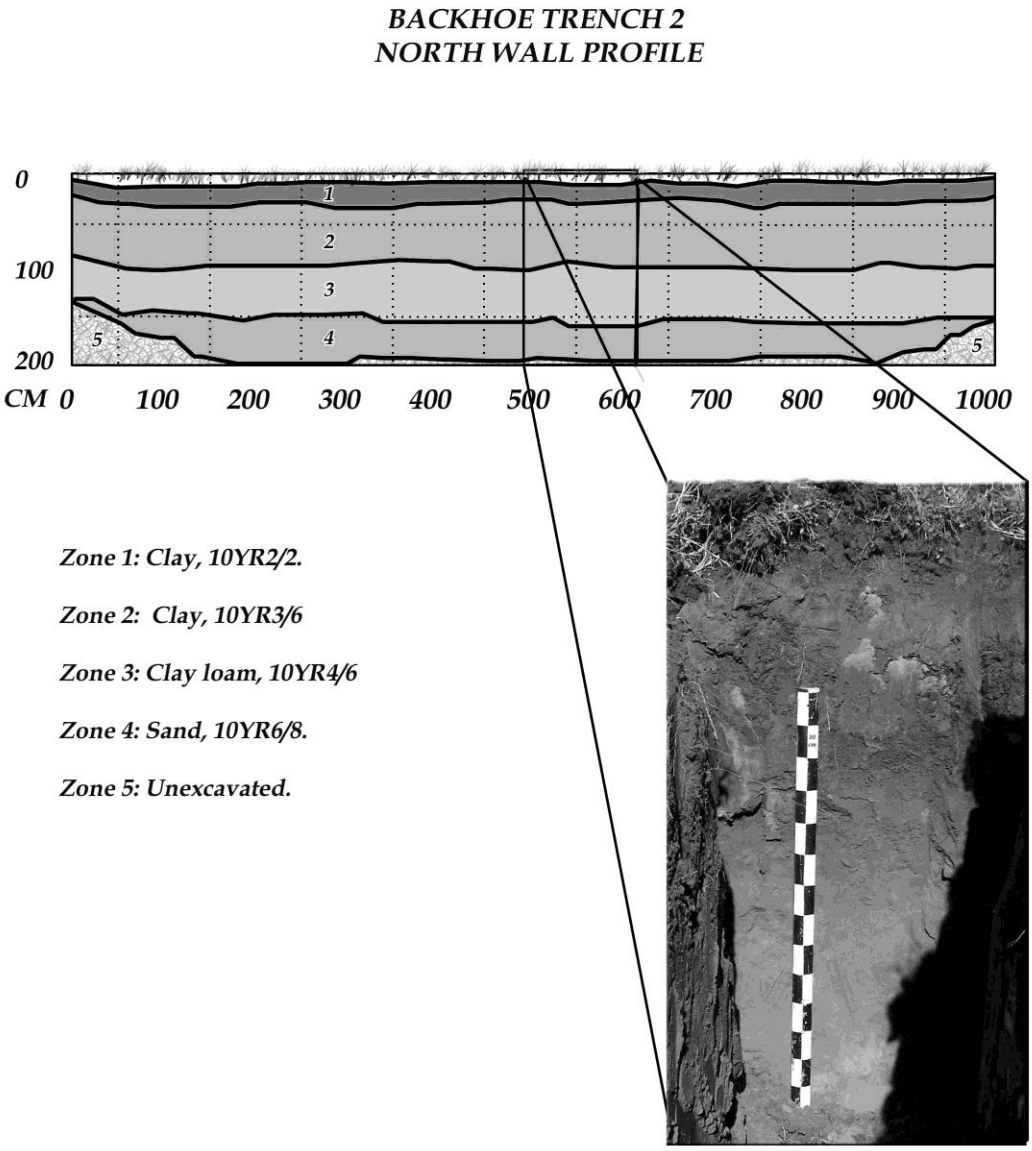

Figure 6. Trench 2 Profile

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Examination of the files at TARL in Austin, Texas revealed no sites have been recorded in the project area, and a professional archaeologist had not previously examined the tract. No archaeological sites were found during the course of this survey. This survey was conducted in accordance with the Minimum Survey Standards as outlined by the Texas Historical Commission, Archeology Division. Additional archaeological work is not considered necessary. Therefore, it is recommended that the client be allowed to proceed with construction as planned. Should evidence of an archaeological site be encountered during the excavation associated with the water pit or the reserve pit, all work must stop until the situation can be evaluated by the THC. Should the location of the reserve pit or water pit be changed, the THC must be notified as additional backhoe trenches may be necessary.

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